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3.11

Disaster and Trauma in Experience, Understanding, and Imagination

Edited by

Christopher Craig, Enrico Fongaro, Andreas Niehaus



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FOREWORD: REVISITING AND UNDERSTANDING 3.11

3/11 is – much like 9/11 – engraved and (re)produced in Japanese and also global memory as a synonym for disaster, catastrophe, trauma, destruction, loss, and uprooting, but equally of solidarity, resilience, and individual heroism. While 9/11 marked the globalization of terror and led to a paradigm shift in global geo-politics, the triple disaster of a magnitude 9 earthquake, a tsunami, and the subsequent nuclear meltdown in the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant, which together caused almost 20,000 casualties, was first of all an environmental catastrophe, exposing the limitations of technology and the risks of political and scientific arrogance in the face of nature.¹ Although the direct impact of the earthquake and tsunami was geographically limited to the Sanriku coast, the northeastern part of the main island Honshū, the catastrophe is by no means simply a national one. Radioactive clouds travelled around the globe, as did debris from destroyed and washed-out houses and other structures, and fish swimming in the affected currents were contaminated by nuclear waste. Nor, too, has any catastrophe in human history been as mediatized and reproduced globally as the triple disaster. TV, YouTube, Instagram, Twitter, and other social media – in a compelling iterative loop – immediately brought unfiltered impressions of shaking buildings, of tsunami waves crawling over quay walls washing away buildings, ships, cars, etc., and the explosions at the Fukushima power plant into the homes of media consumers. The political and social aftershocks

¹ According to the latest statistics of the National Police Agency of Japan 15,897 people were killed, 7,157 injured and 2534 persons are still missing. https://www.npa.go.jp/news/other/earthquake2011/pdf/higaijokyo_e.pdf.

in Japan almost immediately triggered and influenced political discussions and decisions on the future of nuclear energy around the globe.

In the areas struck, – even now, seven years later and despite effective reconstruction work and strong governmental support – the scars of the disaster are still visible in the landscape in the ruins of buildings, in nuclear waste-filled plastic bags stored in fields and along roads, and in uninhabitable red-zones and no-go evacuation zones. The catastrophe also left behind invisible scars in the minds of the victims – scars of trauma that are still not healed. Survivors often felt guilty for not having been able to help or for having survived while others died. Fear of radiation and contamination prevented and still prevents families from returning to their hometowns. The triple disaster meant that people lost their homes and that they had to leave their communities and other family members, often relocated to temporary housing units (*kasetsu*, 仮設) that proved to be “permanently temporary”.² The disaster certainly created a “*communitas of disaster*”³ based on shared national experience and trauma. However, the community of shared experience was effective on a national level only in the direct aftermath of the disaster, and was soon replaced by separate communities of those who had witnessed the catastrophe on TV and those who had experienced it first-hand, exposed to radiation and experiencing direct hardship and tragedy. The discourse of sharedness thus became fragmented and turned into one of exclusion and marginalization; survivors that had left the area were accused of not showing solidarity and standing together in times of crisis. The discussion that surrounded the selection

2 35,000 people were still living in temporary housing on March 11, 2017 (*Japan Times*, 2.4.2017) and Abe Shinzō 安倍晋三 in his memorial address on March 11, 2017 states: “even today, 120,000 people are still in evacuation, leading uncomfortable lives.” http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201703/1221562_11573.html. According to the most current report of the National Police Agency of Japan 121,779 houses were completely destroyed and 280,920 are categorized as “half collapsed” https://www.npa.go.jp/news/other/earthquake2011/pdf/higaijokyo_e.pdf.

3 Edith Turner, *Communitas: The Anthropology of Collective Joy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

of the buzzword *kizuna* (絆, connection) as 2011's word of the year provided an especially revealing glimpse at how in times of catastrophe questions of identity and belonging are culturally, socially, but also politically re-negotiated and utilized. Evacuees also faced discrimination, bullying, and stigmatization connected with fears of radiation, thereby adding to the feelings not only of being uprooted and separated from their *furusato* (故郷, 故里, 故里, home), but actually of being excluded from the larger national community. Social exclusion thus adds yet another scar and weighs heavily on the mental health of survivors and evacuees. Sloterdijk (2006) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) have stressed that it is a basic human need to create a protective and secure environment as a social being.⁴ The need for protection and security then becomes one of the reasons for the emotional bond with one's home and homeland. The Japanese philosopher Nishitani Osamu in his book *Fushi no wandaarando* (*Wonderland of Immortality*) argues that the human being is not born in *Heimat* (*home*), but "born by forming his place of birth as himself," thus creating a kind of organic entity of self and space.⁵ In this perspective, the alienation from one's *home* results in an alienation from the self. This line of thought also generally includes a nostalgic tendency, as "home" has to be brought back, not in the sense of returning to the origin, but

"to let the origin return within the present, to make the present a repetition of the past and by that recreate the union with one's origin. The present must obtain its depth through one's origin, one's *Heimat*. "Loss" means "destruction" and "oblivion" is "blindness". "Loss" as well as "oblivion" guide the human towards the uncanny."⁶

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- 4 Peter Sloterdijk, *Sphären II* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp 1999), p. 633. See also André Leroi-Gourhan, 'Die symbolische Domestikation des Raums', in Jörg J. Dünne, Stephan Günzel (ed. by), *Raumtheorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2006), pp. 228–243 and Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).
- 5 Nishitani Osamu 西谷修, *Fushi no wandaarando* [Wonderland of Immortality] 『不死のワンダーランド』 (Tokyo: Kodansha 講談社, 1996), p. 230.
- 6 Nishitani Osamu, *Fushi no wandaarando*, cit., *ibid.*.

Despite major governmental and individual efforts to restore a sense of security by reconstructing the area and reinforcing tsunami protection along the coastline, a Freudian sense of “*unheimlich*” (uncanny) remains present in the afflicted areas due to social exclusion, expulsion, uninhabited no-entry zones, and the fear of the intrusion of the invisible and insensible.

But disasters, while being natural, human, and social catastrophes, also have another side that cannot be seen in the immediacy of catastrophe itself. This side is generally ignored in disaster-related research, which tends to focus on the immediate consequences or preconditions of a catastrophe. Disasters are a catalyst for cultural, social and political change. They “mobilize forces of cultural change,”⁷ generating such positive effects as solidarity, creativity, renewal and economic growth (at least if one is a believer in the positive effects of economic growth). As an example, after the catastrophe, a wave of solidarity hit the region. The humanitarian response by nations around the globe started immediately by deploying rescue teams,⁸ including medical support teams and rescue dogs. Alongside institutionalized relief activities by governmental institutions or NGOs, individuals also started to organize support events, offered shelter, or simply sent money, food, clothes, toys, and other items to the region. Japanese citizens living as expats abroad were deeply shocked, often having lost friends or family and feeling guilty of being absent when the disaster hit and fellow countrymen and -women needed help.⁹ For example, messages of support by Japanese artists, written in Japanese to the victims of the 11.3 disaster, were posted on the ACT FOR JAPAN website:

7 Susanna M. Hoffmann, Anthony Oliver-Smith, ‘Why Anthropologists Should Study Disaster’, in Susanna M. Hoffmann, Anthony Oliver-Smith (ed. by), *Catastrophe & Culture. The Anthropology of Disaster* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 2002), pp. 3-22.

8 For a complete list see: https://www.mofa.go.jp/j_info/visit/incidents/pdfs/press/20110418/foreign-press-briefing-20110418-mofa.pdf

9 See Andreas Niehaus, Tine Walravens, ‘Home Work: Post-Fukushima Constructions of *Furusato* by Japanese Nationals Living in Belgium’, in Florian Kläger, Klaus Stiersdorfer (ed. by), *Diasporic Constructions of Home and Belonging* (Berlin, Boston: de Gruyter, 2015), pp. 123-145.

“We are trying to unite our efforts and act to support our home country (*furusato*). From Belgium, where we are blessed with a rich cultural environment and the opportunity to share our art, we pray for Japan’s rebirth and declare the message that no matter how hard it may be, Japan will rise up and shine again, just like the sun always rises in the morning. In this time of darkness, Japan needs your support. Until the day we overcome the difficulties and smile again, we will join our hands and act for Japan.”¹⁰

On the national level, nuclear energy politics were suddenly challenged by protests.¹¹ Social scientists proclaimed the return of civil society, challenging the long-held (and highly questionable) Western paradigm of a Japanese society devoid of social grassroots movements.¹² The country witnessed the largest protests since the 1960s, sometimes attended by more than 100,000 participants, despite the fact that media provided scant coverage of or ignored outright the citizens’ demonstrations of discontent. Politicians then aimed to link the protests to sentiments of anti-patriotism, claiming that in times of crisis it is a patriotic duty to support official efforts to manage disaster and attempts to restore normality. Local groups and concerned female citizens voicing concerns over contaminated food showed their decisiveness against political ridicule and pressure, as well as traditional gender stereotypes, when they countered the accusation of spreading unscientific and harmful rumors (*fūhyōhigai*, 風評被害) by founding organizations that monitored radioactive contamination and becoming “citizen scientists”.¹³

Artists, too, responded to the triple disaster and processed national, communal, and individual shock, and mourning

10 See http://www.actforjapan.be/?page_id=20 (30.12.2012).

11 For the protests in Japan following the nuclear catastrophe see Katrin Gengenbach, Maria Trunk, ‘Vor und nach “Fukushima”: Dynamiken sozialer Protestbewegungen in Japan seit der Jahrtausendwende’, in David Chiavacci, Iris Wiczorek (ed. by), *Japan 2012, Politik, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Berlin: VSJF, 2012), pp. 261-282.

12 Isa Duce, *Civil Society and the Internet in Japan* (London, New York: Routledge, 2007).

13 Aya Hirata Kimura, *Radiation Brain Moms and Citizen Scientists: The Gender Politics of Food Contamination after Fukushima* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016).

in creative forms. “Art plays a therapeutic role in providing a site of mourning and reaffirming communal bonds”¹⁴ and performances, photography, paintings, installations, sculpture, film, manga, literature, theatre, and music after Fukushima all became means to deal with national and individual trauma and reunite communities. Others used art to send environmentalist messages and warned of the destructive powers of nuclear energy or disclosed political (ir)responsibility, the shortcomings of political response, and the mendacity of official narratives and official memory.¹⁵

The articles collected in this volume are based on the papers presented at the Hasekura League Conference jointly organized by Tohoku University and Ghent University in Ghent from 12-13 March 2018. Divided into three parts, this book presents the efforts of scholars from several disciplinary backgrounds to grapple with the social, cultural, and political significance of the triple disaster.

The first section, entitled “Conceptualizing Catastrophe,” is comprised of four chapters examining the philosophical bases for the idea of disaster and a range of intangible problems connected with recovery and reconstruction. Marcello Ghilardi opens the volume with a piece exploring the conceptualization of “event” in Buddhist and European traditions and problematizing the mapping of disasters onto events. This is followed by a chapter by Enrico Fongaro, in which he takes up the issue of defining the Fukushima nuclear disaster as an event and the limits of the usefulness of such terms as “catastrophe” and “apocalypse” to describe it. The third chapter is an extended rumination by Ozaki Akihiro on the limitations of physical reconstruction in the recreation of home and the restoration of the spirit in post-

14 Alex Watson: <https://wsimag.com/art/37622-fukushima-in-art>.

15 Artists would include: The art collective Chim↑Pom, Nobuyoshi Araki, Ei & Tomoo Arakawa, Naoya Hatakeyama, Takashi Murakami, Manabu Ikeda, etc. See Alex Watson: <https://wsimag.com/art/37622-fukushima-in-art>; Barbara Geilhorn, Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (ed. by), *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating nuclear disaster*. (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2018) and <http://artradarjournal.com/2015/05/15/japan-after-fukushima-10-artists-making-art-about-the-disaster/>

3.11 Japan. The section closes with Luca Milasi's analysis of the idea of "Hiroshima" in the imaginations and works of Sakaguchi Ango and Mishima Yukio, tracing through these two imposing figures the enduring influence of nuclear destruction on postwar literature.

"Disaster in History and Experience" is the title of the volume's second section. It brings together work from scholars in history and psychology to explore the past and present contexts for the 3.11 triple disaster. Appearing first is a study by Christopher Craig of the media coverage of the 1933 Sanriku Earthquake and Tsunami exploring how newspapers transmitted trauma to a wider audience in the aftermath of a disaster that struck the same region as the 2011 disaster and featured many of the same characteristics. A historiographical examination by Adachi Hiroaki follows, in which he outlines the efforts of Japanese historians following the triple disaster and charts a course forward for the history of disaster in Japan and around the world. The final chapter in the section is a study into behavior among those directly affected by the 2011 earthquake and tsunami by a team led by Abe Tsuneyuki that finds evidence for both mutual aid and illegal activity in post-disaster Sendai.

The book's final section has been reserved to showcase the work of students who participated in a workshop connected to the Ghent symposium and another that followed immediately afterward in Venice. These events, based on the theme of "Bodies and Knowledge across Borders" provided an opportunity for students from Tohoku University, Ghent University, and the University of Venice to present their research and interact in an international academic setting. It is our pleasure to be able to introduce the work of four of these young scholars. Endō-Buseki Sae, a student of archaeology, offers an analysis of stylistic change in the art of Pompeii and its links to volcanic activity and the destruction it caused. Yu Le, working in literature, presents a close reading of the *Heike monogatari* and its uses of the concept of the capital city as home. Ōnuma Yōtarō explores the use of two-dimensional models in the reproduction of three-dimensional Buddhist iconography over

the course of centuries and across East Asia. Finally, Watanabe Miki's chapter is an examination of partially-realized plans to rebuild a Heian-era imperial palace in the late 18th century and the ways in which these plans outlined idealized visions of both the earlier palace and the city that surrounded it.